

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

THOMAS TRELEASE



STATUS OF INTERVIEW:
OPEN FOR RESEARCH



Interview Conducted and Edited by:
Donald B. Seney in 1994
California State University-
Sacramento
For the Bureau of Reclamation's
Newlands Project Oral History Series



Interview desktop published–2019
By Brit Allan Storey, Senior Historian

Oral History Program
Bureau of Reclamation
Denver, Colorado

SUGGESTED CITATION:

Trelease, Thomas. ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW. Transcript of tape-recorded Bureau of Reclamation Oral History Interview conducted by Donald B. Seney. Edited by Donald B. Seney and desktop published by Brit Allan Storey, senior historian, Bureau of Reclamation. Repository for the record copy of the interview transcript is the National Archives and Records Administration in College Park, Maryland.

Record copies of this transcript are printed on 20 lb., 100% cotton, archival quality paper. All other copies are printed on normal duplicating paper.

Table of Contents

Table of Contents.....	i
Statement of Donation.....	iii
Editorial Convention.....	v
Introduction.....	vii
Oral History Interview.....	1
Family and Early Life.....	1
Living on Trelease Lane.....	4
Education.....	5
Going to Work for the Nevada Department of Fish and Game.....	6
Pyramid Lake.....	8
Pyramid Lake Cutthroat Trout.....	10
Trout Restoration Efforts at Pyramid Lake.....	14
Relations with the Pyramid Lake Indians.....	16
Fishery Research in Pyramid Lake.....	23
Pyramid Lake Indians Control the Lake.....	25
Fisheries Recovery Program.....	26
Efforts to Restore Pyramid Lake Fishery.....	31
Defining a Beneficial Use for Water.....	32
Sierra Pacific Power.....	34
Washoe Project.....	36
Relations with the Bureau of Reclamation.....	38
Relations with Sierra Pacific Power.....	40

Opposition to the Fish Recovery Plans.	42
Support for Fishery Recovery Emerges.	43
Pyramid Lake Tribe Uses Court to Press Their Rights.	46
More on the Pyramid Lake Recovery Program. . .	49
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Takes Over Recovery Program.	52
Reintroducing Cutthroat Trout into Pyramid Lake	58
Stillwater Wildlife Area.	64
Effects of the Newlands Project.	67

Statement of Donation

STATEMENT OF DONATION OF ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW OF THOMAS J. TRELEASE

1. In accordance with the provisions of Chapter 25 of Title 44, United States Code, and subject to the terms, conditions, and restrictions set forth in this instrument, I, THOMAS J. TRELEASE, Donor, hereby give, donate, and convey to the National Archives and Records Administration (hereinafter referred to as "the National Archives"), acting for and on behalf of the United States of America, all of my rights and claims, and interest in the information and responses (hereinafter referred to as "the Donated Materials") provided during the interview conducted on AUGUST 12, 1999, at VERNIA, NEVADA and prepared for deposit with the National Archives and Records Administration in the following format: tape recording and transcript. This donation includes, but is not limited to, all copyright interest I now possess in the Donated Materials.
2. Title to the Donated Materials remains with the Donor until acceptance of the Donated Materials by the Archivist of the United States. The Archivist shall accept by signing below.
3.
 - a. It is the intention of the Archivist to make Donated Materials available for display and research as soon as possible, and the Donor places no restrictions upon their use.
 - b. The Archivist may, subject only to conditions placed upon him by law or regulation, provide for the preservation, arrangement, repair, restoration, duplication, reproduction, description, exhibition, display, and servicing of the Donated Materials as may be needed and appropriate.
 - c. For Donated Materials with restrictions, the National Archives will provide access to the Bureau of Reclamation, if the Bureau of Reclamation grants written permission of the Donor specifying the types of information and proposed uses of said information.
4. Copies of the Donated Materials that do not have Donor restrictions on their use, may be deposited in or loaned to institutions other than the National Archives, including the Bureau of Reclamation. Copies of unencumbered Donated Materials may also be provided to researchers. The Bureau of Reclamation may retain copies of tapes, transcripts, and other materials if there are no Donor restrictions on their use, and Reclamation may create copies of tapes, transcripts, and other materials at the time that Donor restrictions on the use of the materials end.
5. The Archivist may dispose of Donated Materials in any manner while preserving the National Archives.

Date: Sept. 12, 1999

Sign: Thomas J. Trelease
THOMAS J. TRELEASE

INTERVIEWER: DR. DONALD B. BENNY

Having determined that the material indicated above by THOMAS T. KELLY is appropriate for
 present release to the United States Government's representative, conditions, policies, decisions,
 procedures, and instructions, and considering that in the public interest it is appropriate to
 deposit with the National Archives and Records Administration, I accept this gift on behalf of the United
 States of America, subject to the terms, conditions, and restrictions set forth in the above instrument.

Date: _____

Signature: _____
 Archivist of the United States

Editorial Convention

A note on editorial conventions. In the text of these interviews, information in parentheses, (), is actually on the tape. Information in brackets, [], has been added to the tape either by the editor to clarify meaning or at the request of the interviewee in order to correct, enlarge, or clarify the interview as it was originally spoken. Words have sometimes been struck out by editor or interviewee in order to clarify meaning or eliminate repetition. In the case of strikeouts, that material has been printed at 50% density to aid in reading the interviews but assuring that the struckout material is readable.

The transcriber and editor also have removed some extraneous words such as false starts and repetitions without indicating their removal. The meaning of the interview has not been changed by this editing.

While we attempt to conform to most standard academic rules of usage (see *The Chicago Manual of Style*), we do not conform to those standards in this interview for individual's titles which then would only be capitalized in the text when they are specifically used as a title connected to a name, e.g., "Secretary of the Interior Gale Norton" as opposed to "Gale Norton, the secretary of the interior;" or "Commissioner John Keys" as opposed to "the commissioner, who was John Keys at the time." The convention in the Federal government is to capitalize titles always. Likewise formal titles of acts and offices are capitalized but abbreviated usages are not, e.g., Division of

Planning as opposed to “planning;” the Reclamation Projects Authorization and Adjustment Act of 1992, as opposed to “the 1992 act.”

The convention with acronyms is that if they are pronounced as a word then they are treated as if they are a word. If they are spelled out by the speaker then they have a hyphen between each letter. An example is the Agency for International Development’s acronym: said as a word, it appears as AID but spelled out it appears as A-I-D; another example is the acronym for State Historic Preservation Officer: SHPO when said as a word, but S-H-P-O when spelled out.

Introduction

In 1988, the Bureau of Reclamation created a history program. While headquartered in Denver, the History Program was developed as a bureau-wide program.

One component of Reclamation's history program is its oral history activity. The primary objectives of Reclamation's oral history activities are: preservation of historical data not normally available through Reclamation records (supplementing already available data on the whole range of Reclamation's history); making the preserved data available to researchers inside and outside Reclamation.

In the case of the Newlands Project, the senior historian consulted the regional director to design a special research project to take an all around look at one Reclamation project. The regional director suggested the Newlands Project, and the research program occurred between 1994 and signing of the Truckee River Operating Agreement in 2008. Professor Donald B. Seney of the Government Department at California State University–Sacramento (now emeritus and living in South Lake Tahoe, California) undertook this work. The Newlands Project, while a small- to medium-sized Reclamation project, represents a microcosm of issues found throughout Reclamation: water transportation over great distances; three Native American groups with sometimes conflicting interests; private entities with

competitive and sometimes misunderstood water rights; many local governments with growing water needs; Fish and Wildlife Service programs competing for water for endangered species in Pyramid Lake and for viability of the Stillwater National Wildlife Refuge to the east of Fallon, Nevada; and Reclamation's original water user, the Truckee-Carson Irrigation District, having to deal with modern competition for some of the water supply that originally flowed to farms and ranches in its community.

Questions, comments, and suggestions may be addressed to:

Andrew H. Gahan
Historian
Environmental Compliance Division (84-53000)
Policy and Administration
Bureau of Reclamation
P. O. Box 25007
Denver, Colorado 80225-0007
FAX: (720) 544-0639

For additional information about Reclamation's history program see:

www.usbr.gov/history

**Oral History Interview
Thomas Trelease**

Family and Early Life

Seney: This is September 12, 1994. My name is Donald Seney, and I'm with Mr. Thomas Trelease in his home near Verdi, Nevada. Good morning, Mr. Trelease.

Trelease: Good morning.

Seney: First I want to begin the interview by asking you to tell me about your mother and father, what they did, where you were born, and how you came to Nevada.

Trelease: Well my mother was born in Salt Lake City and she met my dad in Berlin, Nevada. She came from Salt Lake with her parents over to Berlin and Ione, Nevada, by covered wagon. And then they got married in Salt Lake City. My dad was born over in Colorado in Idaho Springs. He was a miner and he came to Nevada—I'm not certain when he came to Nevada, but he met my mother in Berlin or Ione, Nevada and then they were married. I was born in Park City, Utah.

Seney: Tell me the year and date.

Trelease: In 1919, February 27. Not long after I was born, we came to Sparks, Nevada, and then I lived there until I was about five, and then we went to Edgewater, Colorado.

Seney: Was your dad still in mining? Is that why you moved around a little bit?

Trelease: Yeah, he was still in mining, but he got a job with the Gates Rubber Company, [in Denver, Colorado] and we moved to Colorado, and we lived there until the Depression, and then during the Depression, in 1931 we moved back to Sparks, and we lived in Sparks until 1949, and then moved to this little home here in Verdi, Nevada.

Seney: What do you remember about the Depression?

Trelease: Well, I remember we had problems paying our bills, because Mother would pay the landlord five dollars a month, and that was less than the rent was, so we kept getting deeper in the hole, but finally we ended up getting it paid back after a long time, because I remember my mother and dad kind of celebrating the fact that we got it paid off.

And I know that we ate an awful lot of beans. It was kind of rough going then. I don't remember it as much as an adult would have then, because I was just a kid. But I know clothes were hard to come by, and the food was just very plain. We had enough of it, but it was nothing fancy.

Seney: Are you from a Mormon family?

Trelease: My grandmother was a very staunch Mormon. My own parents and I have never been very religious. I was baptized, though, as a Baptist, but I've never really been very religious.

Seney: I only ask because your family comes from Utah, and that often means, I guess as in the case of your grandmother, that you are from a Mormon family.

Trelease: Well, my grandmother was the daughter of Orrin Porter Rockwell, who was a very important figure in the early days with Brigham Young and Joseph Smith. He was a very close associate of theirs. And he earned the name "Avenging Angel" because he was quite a notorious gunman. He was a guardian of Brigham Young and Joseph

Smith. In reading about his history and some of the information I have on him, it's like reading a western novel—very interesting.¹

Seney: Let's go back [to your own personal history]. You moved to this house which is on Trelease Lane.

Living on Trelease Lane

Trelease: Well, the lane was named after my parents.

Seney: How did that happen?

Trelease: Well, I got a letter one day, and it was from Reno, and this committee was naming the streets in the Verdi area, and they wanted to know if the street already had a local name, and if it didn't, then they wanted to know if I could recommend any names. I recommended Hill Lane, after the gentleman that we bought this house from. But they said they already had another road, which is

1. Orrin Porter Rockwell was known as the "Destroying Angel." For more information, see Danielle B. Wagner, "The Gunslinging General Authority Who Went to Prison on the Prophet's Order: 7 Unbelievable Facts about Porter Rockwell," LDSLiving, <http://www.ldsliving.com/Porter-Rockwell-7-Unbelievable-Facts-and-Stories-You-Didn-t-Know/s/77142>. (Access 2/2019).

down the hill from me here, already scheduled for that name. But they said that that name was already then in use. So then I suggested a Felix O'Neil who was the prior owner before Mr. Hill, but they said they already had a street named for him too. So the next thing I got another letter and they were naming it after my parents, so that's how it came to be.

Seney: That's kind of nice. (Trelease: Yeah.) So what year was it you moved to this house?

Trelease: In 1949.

Seney: And at that point you could have been about thirty years old, am I right? No? Older?

Trelease: About thirty, yeah.

Seney: What were you doing? Tell me a little bit about your education.

Education

Trelease: Well, I was educated at the University of Nevada [at Reno] as far as the higher education is concerned.

Seney: You went to public schools in Sparks?

Trelease: Sparks, yes. And I majored in zoology and minored in botany. I was the first graduate from the University of Nevada to get a degree in fish and wildlife management. And it was there that I met Sessions Wheeler who was the Director of the [Nevada] Department of Fish and Game at that time, and we got to be very good friends. So as soon as I graduated, why, I had a job waiting for me.

Seney: What year did you graduate?

Trelease: Let's see, 1946. And I went to work right at that time as a fisheries biologist. I had been working during the summers and during my school days part-time at the Verdi Fish Hatchery as a fish culturist. And when I graduated, then I got the job as a fisheries biologist. And in a few years, why, the director appointed me as the Chief of Fisheries.

Seney: What did you do as a fisheries biologist when you began with the department?

Going to Work for the Nevada Department of Fish and Game

Trelease: Well, at first I was the only one, and I was doing some research, of which Pyramid Lake was one of my major projects. And then I worked on Lake Mead and most of the other major waters around the state. And at that time we had a county system where each county had its own little fish and game group, and I worked closely with each of them to help guide them in their fisheries projects. Not too long after I went to work, though they changed, and then all of the county units came under the state as part of the state system. And then they were put directly under me for the administration.

Seney: It must have been a relatively small department when you first came.

Trelease: It was. Yeah, there was one game man and one fisheries man that was in the state, and like I said, all we did is kind of aid the counties. Then after the counties turned over their operations to the state, then all of a sudden we had a lot of people, really more than we could handle out of the state office. So then we started getting more people into the state office to help get the various jobs done.

Seney: Tell me about your contact with Pyramid Lake and with the Newlands Project,² and the effects of the Newlands Project and with the Bureau of Reclamation. Start with your first experiences, and don't worry about details, give me all the details you can about Pyramid Lake and the condition of it and the attitude of the Bureau of Reclamation towards that problem, and the attitude of the Newlands Project and T-C-I-D [Truckee-Carson Irrigation District] people toward the problem of Pyramid Lake.

Pyramid Lake

Trelease: Well, I started working on Pyramid Lake when I was a kid, back in 1939. And I wrote several letters to the Isaac Walton League, which was very instrumental in those early days in doing conservation work in connection with fisheries. And I also wrote to what was then called the U.S. Biological Survey, which was the forerunner of the

2. The Newlands Project was one of the first Reclamation projects. It provides irrigation water from the Truckee and Carson rivers for about 57,000 acres of crop lands in the Lahontan Valley near Fallon and bench lands near Fernley in western Nevada. In addition, water from about 6,000 acres of project land has been transferred to the Lahontan Valley Wetlands near Fallon. For more information, see Wm. Joe Simonds, "The Newlands Project," Denver: Bureau of Reclamation History Program, 1996, www.usbr.gov/projects/pdf.php?id=142.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Well, I got several replies back from the Isaac Walton League and we corresponded back and forth, and they took quite a lot of interest in it, which stimulated more interest on *my* part.

Seney: I take it you were raising concerns with them about the condition of the lake?

Trelease: Yes, I could see these huge cutthroat trout that were native to Pyramid Lake just being gradually eliminated. The Indian people had come in [into Sparks and Reno] with several of these large trout in their wagons and sell them. I saw those, and then I saw where they would take the eggs out of the trout and then sell them to the various stores in Sparks to be resold to fishermen as bait, because that was a very good bait, that fresh spawn. And that kind of disturbed me. But then when I started to go out *to* Pyramid Lake, I could see the trout trying to come up out of the lake, but the river was very shallow there because the lake had receded, and this delta was being exposed and the trout couldn't get over that delta. And while they'd be up in the very shallow water, why, the Indian people would go out and gaff them and put them on these piles [of dead fish]. They'd

either take the eggs out of them, and then throw the carcass on these piles of fish, or sometimes they'd take the whole fish with them.

Seney: You mean they might just waste the fish there, looking for the spawn?

Trelease: Yeah, an awful lot of waste, because they were just taking spawn. But there were so many fish coming out at times, when the runs were heavy, and I saw some of those early runs and it impressed me an awful lot. Well, in any event, that's what started my concern.

Seney: Let me just stop you and ask you. I've been told these were large fish. How large do you remember seeing them?

Pyramid Lake Cutthroat Trout

Trelease: How large? (Seney: Yes.) Well, up easily into the twenty-pound bracket. They were just like salmon.

Seney: When you hold your arms out, you mean three feet long?

Trelease: Yeah. I'd say three feet long was not

uncommon at all. And anyway, I could see them going downhill in numbers, and each year there'd be less and less of them.

Seney: At this point you're probably nineteen, twenty years old. Are you a student already at the university?

Trelease: I was a student in high school then.

Seney: What was it that made you understand what was going on here? How did you know that they were ending up destroying the fish?

Trelease: Well I didn't really understand, except that I could see that the fish couldn't get out of the lake, and that the Indians were taking a large number of them. When the fish would get up so far in the shallow water, and if there were no Indians around to get them, the fish would flop over on their sides and seagulls and pelicans would just descend on them just in large numbers and peck out their eyes and their gills, and it'd kill a lot of them. And all this destruction, I just felt couldn't continue. And then when I saw less and less of them each year, I was pretty sure it was taking it's toll, but I didn't know, really, the basic cause at that time. But I was just

concerned, and that's why I wrote those early letters.

And anyway, the Isaac Walton League started to try and take some action there, but before they really got going good, the fish just finally faded out of existence in the early 1940s. And then you could find no more of them, you'd see no more of them out there. And at the same time, as a result of some of these early efforts of the Isaac Walton League and probably the Biological Survey, and maybe even the Bureau of Reclamation—I don't know if they were involved then or not, I don't remember that they were. But in any event, they started to put a channel in to the north and east of the natural channel where the delta was. And the idea of this channel was to make a bypass to go down to the lake so the fish could come out, and then so that they could go back down through it, on their way downstream after their spawning was completed, and so that the young fish when they were going back into the lake would find easy passage to the lake.

Seney: Do you remember what year that was when they first began to do that?

Trelease: I think that was probably around in 1940-41 era, along in there, because before they got the channel finished, I had to go into the service. I believe I went in 1941 or '42. It was probably '41 or '42, and they hadn't finished the channel, but when I came back after the war, why, the channel was in there then, but the fish were gone.

Seney: Did the channel help the *cui-ui* at all?

Trelease: I used to see the *cui-ui* getting up as far as what they called the Marble Bluff Dam,³ which was the diversion dam that diverted the water out of the normal Truckee River Channel and into the manmade channel that they put in. But then they couldn't get above that dam because they couldn't jump very high. They were a more sluggish fish than trout, and that's as far up as they could get.

3. Mr. Trelease may be confused here and is probably referring to the Derby Diversion Dam. Constructed between 1973 and 1975 as part of the Washoe Project, Marble Bluff Dam is located on the Truckee River approximately 50 miles downstream of Reno, Nevada and approximately 3 miles upstream of Pyramid Lake. It is a zoned earthfill structure with a height of 22 feet and crest length of 1,622 feet, and it has a capacity of 19,700 cubic feet per second through the spillway. It functions to halt erosion within the Pyramid Lake Paiute Tribe's Reservation and controls water used by the Pyramid Lake Fishway.

But I did see them up there on a few occasions.

Trout Restoration Efforts at Pyramid Lake

Then when I started working with the Department of Fish and Game, one of the projects that I started working on, as I said before, was Pyramid Lake. And I and a good friend of mine, Dr. Ira LaRivers, who was teaching at the University of Nevada, we started putting pens out in Pyramid Lake and we'd put fish in them, live trout, both rainbow and cutthroat, and we'd put them into the lake and then see how long they'd survive there. The rainbow didn't do too well, but the cutthroat did very well.

Seney: These were cutthroat that you'd gotten out of Independence Lake?

Trelease: No, we got them from our Verdi Hatchery [which in turn got them from Heenan Lake, California]. See, by that time I was then working with the Fish and Game Department as Chief of Fisheries, and I was able to take fish then from our Verdi Hatchery and use them in our experiments. Well, when that happened, then we came to the conclusion that trout could live in the

lake, and we started doing quite a bit of research ~~between the two of us~~ [with Dr. Ira LaRivers at the University of Nevada, Reno]. Dr. LaRivers was primarily an entomologist, interested in insects, and I was interested in the fisheries. But we worked together on the lake and collected quite a bit of data. And the more we collected, the more we were convinced that Pyramid Lake could support fish, and as we did our research we could see more clearly all the time that the real problem was the water diversion, mostly at Derby Dam,⁴ which took the water away from the lake and the lake then receded. And when it receded, it exposed the delta at the mouth of the river, and that's what was creating all of the problems.

I mean, there was basically the diversion of water, and then the secondary effect of having the delta exposed, which blocked the fish from getting up into their spawning areas, and they could no longer

4. Built in 1905, Derby Dam is a diversion dam on the Truckee River, located between Reno and Fernley in Storey and Washoe counties in Nevada. As a primary feature of the Newlands Project, it diverts water that would otherwise feed Pyramid Lake into the Carson River watershed for irrigation use.

reproduce. So then the fish that were in the lake, they just kept growing larger and larger until they were either caught or they died out just from old age. In those days, there was practically no fishing. You know, after the fish went downhill and they got to the point where they weren't abundant enough to catch them readily, people lost interest in fishing, and they attributed the loss of the fish to the alkalinity and salinity of the lake, but it wasn't that at all.

Seney: What was your relationship with the Pyramid Lake Indians during your attempts to see what kind of trout might be able to live in the lake?

Relations with the Pyramid Lake Indians

Trelease: Well, at first it was rather delicate, because they had a strong dislike towards the white man, because they felt that he was the one that caused the disappearance of the fish, and they were right. But they didn't differentiate between the different white people, and they just lumped me right in with all the rest of them, and they didn't want any part of what I was trying to do out there.

Seney: Tell me about how you overcame their feelings. Were you able to overcome those feelings?

Trelease: Oh yes.

Seney: Tell me how you did that.

Trelease: Well, it kind of started out with just a couple of Indians that we got to help us when were putting out our traps and doing some of our early research.

Seney: You didn't need the Indians' permission to conduct experiments?

Trelease: Yeah, we got the permission, and they gave that to us, but rather reluctantly. Mostly, it was on the basis that we'd hire a couple of their Indian people to work with us. One of them was Avery Winnemucca who was alive at that time. And the other one, a very good friend of mine—Warren Toby. And Warren helped us very much. But as those two started working with us, they could begin to see what we were trying to do, and they could see then more clearly what had happened to the lake, and they began to talk to their other Indian people, you know. And

it wasn't too long before they began to work more closely with us. And then finally as we really began to get into the research there, then they really started working closely with us.

Seney: What did you learn from them?

Trelease: Well, we learned a lot of some of the basic things about the lake, where the trout had formerly ran up in the early days. We learned quite a bit about what the fishing was like and what the fish runs were like in the early days before Derby Dam was put in and had its effect. We learned a lot about how the Indian people thought.

Seney: How did they describe the fish runs to you before Derby Dam was put in?

Trelease: Well, the way they described it, there was an ample number of fish that all they had to do was just go down almost at any time of the year and get any number of fish that they wanted. And then they'd split them and put them over racks and dry them for winter use. And then during the spring and summer, of course, they'd get them for their use during the spring and summer. But they also dried them for winter use too—both *cui-ui* and

trout. They like *cui-ui* very much too.

Seney: Did it take some time? I guess it was up almost 'til the time the cutthroat trout were extinct they were still pretty numerous.

Trelease: The *cui-ui*?

Seney: The cutthroat. How long did they tell you before they began to notice the effect of the dam on the fish?

Trelease: Well, I personally noticed it over a period of maybe three or four years, where I noticed the decline.

Seney: Was it a rapid decline?

Trelease: Fairly rapid, yeah. And when it went out, it just went out, bang, and they were gone.

Seney: You started to tell me, before I interrupted you: What did you learn from the Indian people in general?

Trelease: Well, like I say, we learned what their thinking was like, and what their attitudes were towards white people.

Seney: Pretty negative attitudes, I would think.

Trelease: At that time, it was very negative. I was even told to leave a council meeting that I had attended one night. There was an Indian man—I won't give his name—but he was under the influence of liquor there and he got up, and I can remember this very clearly, and put his head up in the air, his chin up kind of high in the air, and started talking in Paiute, and the more he'd talk, the madder he'd get. And finally they stopped him and I guess it was his wife was with him. She got up and then she started doing the same thing. And then before long it seemed like two or three of them were talking very loudly and emphatically in Paiute, so the chairman stopped the meeting and he told me that he thought I'd probably better leave, that they were getting pretty irate, just talking about what happened to their fishery. And so he had a couple of other Indians there escort me out to my car, and I took off and left. Quite some time later I got to know this Indian fellow that started the problem there, and got to be fairly good friends with him.

END SIDE 1, TAPE 1. SEPTEMBER 12, 1994.

BEGIN SIDE 2, TAPE 1. SEPTEMBER 12, 1994.

Trelease: And then about that same time I got to know his brother, and got to be good friends with him, and he was one of our strong supporters up until he died. It was quite a rewarding experience working with those people and seeing them come around to our way of thinking. Well, anyway, as time went on, we went into more and more research, and then we applied . . .

Seney: Excuse me for interrupting: You started to say something about the way the Indians think. And I keep interrupting and getting you off this subject, but the Indian view of life, as you began to appreciate it. Can you give me some sense of that?

Trelease: Well, you just mentioned there was more of a sense [of their feelings] than what they said. At first they were very hostile towards us, and then they just got to be mediocre, and being friendly, just kind of tolerated us. And then they finally got to be *very* friendly, and even came to us for advice and help. And they've come into our commission meetings and sit in on some of the meetings. They would invite me out to some of their meetings. I can remember one situation where the Navy that had a base over in

Fallon wanted to use Pyramid Lake as a range for using torpedoes from their torpedo bombers. And the Indians didn't want that, they thought that was an abuse of the lake. And they came to us for our help to help them in getting that stopped, which we gave them. I don't know if we were the ones that were responsible for keeping the bombing or the torpedo testing, or whatever it was, out of the lake, but they never did do it. But we did our part in helping to prevent it. And just that attitude of them changing and going from hostile to coming to us for help was very worthwhile.

Then when the Washoe Project⁵ was proposed, and that was a Bureau of Reclamation project, again they came to us for help, because that would have taken more water out of the lake and they didn't want that. So in general, why that's the attitude they had.

5. Constructed between 1960 and 1987, the Washoe Project was designed to improve the regulation of runoff from the Truckee and lower Carson River systems. It also provides fishery uses, flood protection, fish and wildlife benefits, and recreation development. Major features of the project include: Prosser Creek, Stampede, and Marble Bluff dams, along with the Pyramid Lake Fishway. For more information, see Carolyn Hartl, "Washoe Project," Denver: Bureau of Reclamation History Program, 2001, www.usbr.gov/projects/pdf.php?id=208.

Seney: Why don't you go back to the research project and tell me some more about your research.

Fishery Research in Pyramid Lake

Trelease: Okay, we applied to the Fleischmann Foundation for our project to work on Pyramid Lake. And we also added Lake Tahoe and Walker Lake to it so we'd have two lakes that were similar in nature: that would be Pyramid and Walker, which were both terminal lakes at the ends of the river systems that they were on. And then we had one fresh-water lake that was free of saline conditions like Pyramid and Walker—or saline and alkaline conditions. And the Fleischmann Foundation gave us a grant of \$100,000, which we then used as matching money to get federal aid projects under the Dingell-Johnson Act,⁶ for which we had to provide one-quarter of the total cost of the project. And we started projects on those three lakes. And that's when we really went into the intensive research, and we gathered all the information we could, and started a

6. Dingell-Johnson Act, enacted August 9, 1950, is official referred to as the Federal Aid in Sportfishing Restoration Act, 64 Stat. 430.

restocking project.

Seney: This would have been for the cutthroat trout?

Trelease: This [research] was for the cutthroat and the *cui-ui*, because we put the *cui-ui* on because it was a very important fish to the Pyramid Lake Tribe. We kind of incorporated the tribe into the project. We kept them advised of all of the things we were doing out there, and we even would go out and meet with them in setting seasons and limits and all that. We tried to keep them as closely involved as we could. And when they said they wanted this, or they didn't want that, we listened to them. Then if we had good reason for telling them we didn't agree with that, or that we *did* agree with it, we'd tell them that. And that's when we were having our very close relationships with them. We worked very well together.

Seney: Let me ask you, when you were saying you'd take the Indians' views into consideration and you tried to keep them posted and cooperate with them and listen to them on things: Why was that? Was that because they had some kind of political influence, or because you thought it was fair to do that?

Or maybe a combination of both?

Pyramid Lake Indians Control the Lake

- Trelease: Well, mostly it was probably we wanted to be fair with them, because we felt that they had been pretty badly treated in the past. And we didn't want to destroy our relationship with them by keeping them off to the side in a lake that was theirs. We wanted to bring them into it and make them part of the restoration plan and the whole program there.
- Seney: Could you have operated independently without their approval? (Trelease: No.) Did you have the statutory authority to do that?
- Trelease: No. No, the lake belongs to them, and it's on a reservation, an Indian reservation. And an Indian reservation, as I understand it, is just like another nation within the United States. And except for Congress, white man's regulations don't apply to the reservations. Well, I don't even know if federal [regulations apply]—I guess federal regulations might, probably like in civil cases. But you've seen situations where even federal officers were not allowed to

come onto reservations. So I don't know a lot about that, but it was my understanding that we had no authority at all over there, and the only way we could have any impact was by cooperation.

Seney: Tell me, what were the elements of this recovery program of Pyramid Lake?

Fisheries Recovery Program

Trelease: Well, the primary thing was recognizing what the problem was, and the fact that the lake would still support trout. And then we embarked on a stocking program to see if we could acquire any results out of that kind of a program. We knew the trout, if there were any in the lake, we knew that they weren't able to get up into the river to spawn. And we knew too that if we were going to restore any fishing to the lake, it was going to have to be by stocking fish *in* the lake and letting them grow there. But we didn't know whether little ones—we stocked little fry, fingerlings and reared fish—which one was the most apt to be successful. So we tried some of each, and on the larger fish we would fin clip them and remove one or more of their fins so that if and when they were caught, they would be recognized. The real

Bureau of Reclamation History Program

tiny fish and the fingerling, we didn't know what would happen with those, because we wouldn't be able to differentiate those, other than if they were unmarked we would know they weren't any of the marked fish we planted.

Seney: But you wouldn't know if they were fingerlings or whether they were fry.

Trelease: No. One of the things that also occurred that triggered a lot of interest out there: There's a species of fish called Sacramento perch out there. They were also found in Walker Lake. Over in Walker Lake you could catch them very readily by hook and line. But I and Dr. LaRivers had tried several times to catch them by hook and line [from Pyramid Lake], and we never could. And yeah, we could catch them in nets, and we knew they were out in the lake. Then we'd see their young ones around in the shallow shoreline areas.

So I got some friends of mine from the department, and we went out there one morning to try and catch those fish. And this was in a winter month, because we had tried in the summer and couldn't catch them.

So we thought, "What the heck, let's try it in the wintertime." So we went out there this winter and the first cast that I made I tied into this big trout. This was in the lake close to the mouth of the river. And the reason we went there was we thought maybe the inflowing water would have some impact on the Sacramento perch there. And so that's where we went. Well, the first cast I got this large trout and immediately I thought it was one of the old original native Pyramid Lake cutthroat trout. And that got me too excited, and I started trying to horse the fish in and lost it.

So right away, though, we began to hook up more of them. And pretty quick we got one in and we found they were *not* cutthroat, they were big rainbow, and they were fish up in the five-pound class, and they were rainbow. We came to the conclusion that they must have gotten into the lower river, below the Derby Dam, and spawned there successfully, and got back into the lake. Or else it was either that, or—and this was a more probable explanation—is that during some high-water periods, they came down from the Truckee River in the vicinity of Reno and Sparks and above, came down over Derby Dam and

went on into the lake. In any event, they were there. So we got pictures of them and put them in the paper, and that stimulated a *lot* of interest. And almost the day after, when we went out to Pyramid, we couldn't hardly find a place to put our lines in, because people were all over the south end of the lake there.

Seney: And that was your object, was to stimulate interest?

Trelease: That was our object, was to stimulate interest, because even with the research that we were doing, and the positive outlook that we had on the lake, we still weren't getting as strong of support among the public as we wanted, because they weren't as aware of it as we were, you know.

Seney: The public—you mean the fishermen especially.

Trelease: Yeah. But when that [news article] came out, that stimulated a lot of interest.

Seney: I'm sure it did!

Trelease: We even got a letter from the Fallon area in

which they told the commission they didn't want us to do any research out there. And the reasoning I'm sure—this is my own opinion—was that they didn't want us to do any research out there because they didn't want to see a fishery restored out there, because it could conflict with *their* water supply.

Seney: What year are we talking about now, that this is going on?

Trelease: Well, this would have been, I'd say, between 1947 and 1949.

Seney: Now when you say you got a letter from Fallon, was that from the Truckee-Carson Irrigation District, or . . .

Trelease: No, I don't recall. I think it was from their sportsmen's group that they had. Like I told you before, every county had a sportsmen's group. Well, they continued on an unofficial basis. They weren't part of our state system, after the state kind of took over all of the operations. But these local sportsmen's groups would send information in advising the commission of what they'd like to see and what they didn't want to see. We got this letter in which they didn't want to see us

do any research out ~~there~~ [at Pyramid Lake].

Seney: Well, they were quite right about that, weren't they?

Trelease: Yeah, they were. Yeah, because once that fishing began to take hold, and the general public started to see the effects of it, people started getting on our side, and we were requested and made numerous speeches to service groups all around Reno, Sparks, Carson City, even Truckee. And people wanted to find out what was going on out there.

Seney: Talking about your restoration project and about the lake?

Efforts to Restore Pyramid Lake Fishery

Trelease: We would tell them what we were doing, and then at that time this Washoe Project was coming into the picture, and the California-Nevada Compact Commission was trying to get that project, the Washoe Project, underway and get it completed, because that would give more water to the state of Nevada and state of California for other purposes. We were trying to get in,

and we'd go to numerous Compact Commission meetings, and our efforts were trying to get water recognized for fish and wildlife for both Pyramid Lake and the Stillwater Wildlife Management Area.

Seney: When you say "recognized," do you mean recognized as a beneficial use?

Trelease: As a beneficial use, yes. We met with very strong opposition.

Seney: Was the state of Nevada divided over this? I mean, the state government? I mean, you were wanting the water to get down into Stillwater Marsh (Trelease: And Pyramid Lake.) and Pyramid Lake. What other part of the state of Nevada took a different view?

Defining a Beneficial Use for Water

Trelease: Well, there were others, like the State Engineer's Office. They didn't recognize the use of water for fisheries or for wildlife as a beneficial use at that time. The power company [Sierra Pacific Power] was strongly opposed to seeing water used for fisheries. They wanted to see it used for domestic use and power generation. The agricultural interests: they didn't want to see

it used for fisheries or game or wildlife, because they wanted to see it used for the growing of crops. So we had all these other entities, but we felt an obligation to the sportsmen, and we also had an obligation to the Fleischmann Foundation because they were the ones that provided the money for the research for the specific purpose of trying to restore Pyramid Lake. That was one of the main objectives. So we continued on with our research and it was successful in developing the fishery.

Then once that fishery started coming into being that's when we began to get support from all these service groups that we had been talking to. And there was one period of time there where if we had wanted to, I think we could have killed the Washoe Project. But we didn't, that wasn't our objective. We wanted to just be recognized as part of it and have part of the water provided for the fishery at Pyramid Lake, and we even submitted a plan for a considerably less amount of water than they would have gotten if the Washoe Project had never gone through, because the Washoe Project would have tapped the flood waters that were reaching Pyramid Lake. So the

flood waters were helping to maintain the lake's level.

But with what we had proposed as a flow for fisheries, it was a scheduled flow with the maximum flow of only thirty-five second-feet. It would have been less than they would have gotten out of those flood waters. But even that was rejected at first. And the Bureau of Reclamation, they were opposed to us at first, again because they wanted the water for other purposes. So we were kind of alone in fighting all these other agencies. And we were even told once by the power company to get out of their way or they'd steamroller right over us. They told us that in a public meeting. And then Warren Toby and I one time were invited to leave a Compact Commission because they didn't want us to apparently hear some of the things they were talking about, so we had to leave.

Seney: You did leave?

Trelease: Yeah, we had to leave.

Sierra Pacific Power

Seney: Well, I would think when Sierra Pacific

Power tells you in a public meeting get out of the way or they'll steamroll over you, that's a pretty potent threat from Sierra Pacific.

Trelease: *It was* a potent threat, but see, in those days, there wasn't the interest in recreation and fish and wildlife that developed later. And people just kind of accepted that fish and game would be pushed aside for all these other uses. They'd been doing that for so long that they just figured that was the way of life. But we didn't feel that way. So, we kept going back and going back, and making these requests and putting stumbling blocks in their way in every way we could, trying to get water [fish and wildlife] recognized as part of the beneficial uses, so at least, that we'd get some flow into the lake to try and help the lake and restore the fishery, and also for the Stillwater Wildlife Management Area. And like I say, we met with strong opposition at first. But then things started changing on a national level.

Seney: This would be the early 1960s?

Trelease: I'd say it would be about that time, yeah. And more and more interest started to

develop in environmental issues. And that, coupled with our efforts on the lake in trying to get water recognized [for fish and wildlife], finally begin to get some of the agencies to start looking a little more closely and giving a little more consideration to us. And eventually it came around to where we got more recognition, and we even got recognition for that thirty-five second-foot flow of water that we had proposed.

Washoe Project

Originally we had proposed a hundred second-feet, but, soundly, we again met with opposition on that. I think we made the mistake of making two proposals: one for a hundred second-feet and one for thirty-five. And the thirty-five was the lesser of two evils in the eyes of the opposition. We settled for the thirty-five, and it then was recognized and considered into the Washoe Project documents that went through Congress, you know. And that finally became an act, and when it did, why, those recognitions were there for the flow of water into the lake, and for beneficial use.

Seney: Did the Washoe Project legislation recognize fishery as a beneficial use?

Trelease: As I recall it did. Because of letters that we wrote and I believe they accepted, and then by this time now the Fish and Wildlife Service was getting into the act, and the Indian Service [Bureau of Indian Affairs] was beginning to take a more forceful attitude towards protecting the interests of the Indians. Prior to that time, and clear back to the instigation of the Newlands Project, the Indian Service was not taking a strong stand in favor of the Indians, because they were pretty well dominated by the Bureau of Reclamation. And so there was a conflict and they just didn't make much effort.

But then as these changes began to come about, they began to swing in behind us, and they were supportive of what we were trying to do. And all these things together began to make the Bureau change, they began to become more cooperative, and they began to accept some of the things we were putting into these letters and supporting them. So that when these documents went to Congress, I think one of the statements was that the use of water for fish and wildlife would be recognized as a beneficial use. I think that's in there. I

wouldn't swear to it, but I believe it is.

Seney: Can you comment on your first contacts with the Bureau of Reclamation as you're working with the Fish and Wildlife Service—or maybe even earlier as you're interested in Pyramid Lake? Do you remember your first contacts with the Bureau.

Relations with the Bureau of Reclamation

Trelease: Yeah, my first contact was that they were very negative towards our interests, and they just kind of felt we were not a significant enough interest to pay much attention to us. Well, I'll mention *his* name, because in the long run we worked out together alright. But there was a fellow by the name of Hollis Hunt, and he was in charge of the Carson Office which was the one that was concerned with Pyramid Lake and the Newlands Project. And at first he and I didn't get along at all, and then one day I received a call from him and he wanted to go out to Pyramid Lake with me and see different flows that occurred in the river. And when it got down to the point where I thought it was still suitable to allow these big fish to come up and go back down, to let

him know. So I received this call from him, and I said sure I'd be glad to do that.

And this surprised me, because before that he was always so negative, you know. So when I kept going out there and checking the river in the places I felt were pretty critical outside of the delta area, and when the flows got to the point that I felt the flows were as low as we could [safely] go, that's when I called him and we went out there together. And the flows at that time were between a hundred second-feet and thirty-five second-feet. So that was how we arrived at our thirty-five second-foot minimum flow. And that all went into these documents that went to Congress.

Seney: As a result of your taking him out there, I take it he didn't oppose you on that then—he accepted the thirty-five second-feet flow.

Trelease: Yeah. By that time, getting out there with him kind of opened our eyes, both of us, on each side's viewpoints and everything, and it was helpful. Before that, all I'd ever done is met him at these meetings and there he had a lot of the other people that were also opposed to us, that I think he felt he had to

take a stronger position against us, because they were looking over his shoulder. But when we were alone out there, I found out he wasn't a half-bad guy. (both chuckle)

Relations with Sierra Pacific Power

This also happened with a fellow in the power company. His name was George Devore, and he's the one that told us [to get out of their way or they would stemroller right over us].

END SIDE 2, TAPE 1. SEPTEMBER 12, 1994.

BEGIN SIDE 1, TAPE 2. SEPTEMBER 12, 1994.

Seney: This is September 12, 1994. My name is Donald Seney and I'm with Mr. Thomas J. Trelease at his home in Verdi, Nevada.

Trelease: Actually, I am in California. This is in California.

Seney: Oh we are? I see the Sierra County sign. I thought maybe it was California.

Go ahead about Mr. Devore and the power company.

Trelease: Yes, I was telling about George Devore. He

and I just didn't see eye-to-eye at all, but as times begin to change, and as the Compact Commission developed, kind of an odd thing happened there. George, in the early part of the Compact Commission, was really the only one that had a lot of very good knowledge on the flows of the river, because he'd lived with it for a long time. And California was kind of at a disadvantage, because they didn't have that kind of information. But then the Colorado River suit⁷ that was going on terminated down there, and they had a group of people, and it's my understanding that these computer people working on the Colorado River were transferred to Sacramento and some of them were put on this Washoe Project. So then they began to feed all this information, all these past records into the computers, and before long they had it in a situation where they could come up with accurate information quicker than George Devore could.

7. It is believed that Mr. Trelease is referring to *Arizona v. California*, 373 US 546 (1963). For more information, see Justia US Supreme Court, "Arizona v. California, 373 US 546 (1963)," <https://supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/373/546/>. (Accessed 2/2019)

Well this then put him at a disadvantage. And then he began to try to get all of the support he could for getting water into the state of Nevada, get it on our side of the state line. And lo and behold, he started becoming friendly with me, and eventually we got to respect each other quite a lot. When he left we had a healthy respect and knew each other and liked each other.

Seney: Sierra Pacific Power has, I suppose, a deserved reputation for being somewhat pragmatic in these matters.

Opposition to the Fish Recovery Plans

Trelease: Yeah, they were. Well, like I said, the power company—well, the ones that were opposed to us was the power company, the City of Reno, the City of Sparks, Washoe County, the Bureau of Reclamation, the Truckee-Carson Irrigation District, and then there was another irrigation district right in Reno.

Seney: The Washoe County Water Conservation District?

Trelease: That may have been the name of it. I know their interest primarily focused around Boca

Bureau of Reclamation History Program

Reservoir.

Seney: They're the ones who paid for Boca.

Trelease: Yeah, and Mr. Dick Taylor was the one that was in charge of that. They were somewhat opposed to us, although they were a little more cooperative, because they had a kind of a chunk of water that was not part of the whole picture, because they had the stored water in Boca Reservoir. But those are the groups who were opposed to us.

Seney: Sounds like everyone was opposed to you.

Trelease: They were. We were about the only ones that wanted to see ~~the~~ [for fish and wildlife use] water—and the sportsmen, of course. But we were their voice, you know.

Seney: Well, it sounds to me like from what you've said that the real changes occurred not so much locally, but nationally in terms of changes about environment and Indian rights, and those filtered down and had an impact locally. Is that kind of the way it went?

Support for Fishery Recovery Emerges

Trelease: Well, there were two main factors that effected a real change. First and probably foremost was the development of the fishery. So people were going out and they were getting these fish, and that stimulated a *lot* of local interest. And it was the local interest—we could have stopped that Washoe Project at one point there, because they were strongly on our side. They wanted water for Pyramid Lake. Then when this recreation thing came into the picture, that was kind of a simultaneous thing, but slightly behind the development of the fishery. That augmented the support that we were getting, and began to put more and more pressure on these agencies and interests who were opposed to us. And gradually I guess they could see the picture on the wall and started coming around giving us more recognition.

And then finally the icing on the cake—and this is after the Washoe Project and after the development of the fishery and its recognition as a national resource, the final thing was the [law] suits that the Indians brought against the water users on the Truckee River system to get water recognized for their fishery, which went to court, and eventually they won in the Supreme Court. They were awarded water.

It's my understanding, and I don't have the wording on it, but they were awarded water sufficient to allow the maintenance of the fishery of their lake.

Seney: The Endangered Species Act is important too isn't it?

Trelease: Yeah, that was an important one, especially on the *cui-ui*. But that also applied to the cutthroat trout. But again, that was part of the environmental interest that was developing in those days. And that law had a substantial effect in the Washoe Project and on the Truckee River's system, because *cui-ui* were recognized as a rare and endangered species, and so was the cutthroat trout. And we were instrumental—we weren't the only ones—but we participated in getting both of those species recognized as rare and endangered species. I think now the cutthroat has been elevated to a threatened species now. But the *cui-ui* is still considered a rare and endangered species.

Seney: Do you recall when the Indians began to use the courts to press their rights for more water?

Pyramid Lake Tribe Uses Court to Press Their Rights

Trelease: I remember when they hired an attorney to work for them. He, up to the time I retired—well, even before—they filed their suit with another attorney. Some conflict, I don't know just what the conflict was, arose, and they let that attorney go, and then they hired another attorney. I think he was a private attorney. They hired a second one. And then they got some attorneys from the Justice Department out of Washington. And then the suit was filed, I think, about the time they got their second attorney.

Seney: Would that be Mr. [Robert] Pelcyger?⁸

Trelease: No, even before him. This is a little hazy in my mind, I can't think of his name. He came over, I believe, from Winnemucca, and he worked with Bob Pelcyger, and also a fellow by the name of King, that passed away during that period of time. Either the

8. Robert Pelcyger participated in Reclamation's Newlands Series Oral History Project. See, Robert (Bob) S. Pelcyger, *Oral History Interviews*, Transcript of tape-recorded Bureau of Reclamation Oral History Interviews conducted by Professor Donald B. Seney for the Bureau of Reclamation, in 1995 and 2006, in Reno, Nevada, and Boulder, Colorado, 1995 interviews edited by Donald B. Seney and all interviews further edited by Brit Allan Storey, senior historian of the Bureau of Reclamation, 2013, www.usbr.gov/history/oralhist.html.

private attorney filed the suit, or maybe Pelcyger or King. It was right in that same era. They filed a suit which finally went on up to the Supreme Court.

Seney: Well that one, actually the Indians didn't do so well on. That one they didn't let them reopen the Orr Ditch Decree.⁹ I mean, they won *some* rights on that, but it wasn't really a big victory for them. There was a suit that came sort of in the midst of all that. The OCAP suit in Judge [Gerhard] Gessel's court in Washington, D.C., where the judge said that T-C-I-D had to use the water more efficiently and divert more into Pyramid

9. The Orr Ditch Decree was entered by the U.S. District Court for the District of Nevada in 1944 in *United States v. Orr Water Ditch Co., et al.* The decree was the result of a legal action brought by the United States in 1913 to fully specify who owned water rights on the Truckee River and had rights to storage in Lake Tahoe. The Orr Ditch decree adjudicated water rights of the Truckee River in Nevada and established amounts, places, types of use, and priorities of the various rights, including the United States' right to store water in Lake Tahoe for the Newlands Project. The decree also incorporated the 1935 Truckee River Agreement among Sierra Pacific Power Company (now Truckee Meadows Water Authority), TCID, Washoe County Water Conservation District, Department of the Interior, and certain other Truckee River water users. See, Truckee Carson Irrigation District, "What is the Orr Ditch Decree and why is it important?" <http://www.tcid.org/support/faq-detail-view/what-is-the-orr-ditch-decree-and-why-is-it-important> (Accessed 5/2016)

Lake. That was one I think that maybe they won more than what became known as *Nevada v. the United States*.

Trelease: Well, I remember the first court. It was appealed. Then it went to San Francisco, I think, and it was appealed there, I believe. Both of those cases the Indians lost. Then it went to the Supreme Court. Maybe that's the one you're talking about.

Seney: Right. And it *did* define some of the rights, but they won a big victory when the court ruled that the Secretary of the Interior could take the water from Stampede Reservoir and use it for Pyramid Lake.

Trelease: Well that's probably the one I'm thinking of.

Seney: Yeah, to use it to restore Pyramid Lake. (Trelease: Yeah.) So the Secretary of the Interior has the authority to do that.

When *did* you retire from Fish and Game?

Trelease: I retired in 1976 and that's why I'm getting into a hazy area.

Seney: Right, some of these things come a little bit

after 1976.

Trelease: Yeah, because I started working for the attorneys for the state while I was still employed with the Fish and Game Department. They assigned me that as part of the project. And then I retired, and I continued working with the state for a while, and then when I got completely out of it, that's when I began to lose contact with it, and I'm kind of hazy about what happened in the courts because I wasn't personally involved.

Seney: I want to go back to ask you a little bit more about the original recovery. When you put the fry in—and define for me and for the people who are going to read this—what does it mean when you say a "fry" when you're talking about fish?

More on the Pyramid Lake Recovery Program

Trelease: When trout first hatch out, they have the yolk sac still attached to them, and their mouth parts aren't fully developed to where they can eat, so they live on that yolk sac. They consider that the alevin or fry stage. Then as they continue to grow, then their

mouth parts fully develop, the yolk sac shrinks up, and then they begin to ingest outside food. And as they're doing that, they're growing, and when they get up to about the size of your finger, probably of a small man, they start calling them fingerling. And then when they get up to about six inches long, they start calling them reared trout.

At each stage, the fry stage, they're more susceptible to predation because they've got even insects that prey on them then, plus all the diseases that will affect trout, you know, plus larger predators that will eat them. And then they get up to fingerling stage, they probably eliminate a lot of the insects that can prey on them, but they still have other predators that will eat them, besides the diseases. Then when they get up to six inches long, they have fewer predators, but they still have diseases and they still have predators that can eat them. And then about that size, they start biting on hooks and they can be affected by man then.

Seney: The major predator.

Trelease: Yeah, the major predator. So when we set up the programs at Pyramid Lake, we took

those things into consideration, and we went for six-inch fish to try and get them away from chubs, which were very abundant in Pyramid Lake, and they can get up to about fourteen inches in length, and they will eat small fish. They can't, I don't believe, handle a six-inch trout, though. So that was why we went to planting reared fish, and it worked, and they continued growing out in the lake and they'd come back and there were some phenomenal catches made on large fish out there.

Well then we found that people were using bait that would catch the little fish, and they would catch fish even down to ten and twelve inches long. We knew the lake was capable of growing much larger fish and we wanted to see them get to be trophy fish. So people that were using bait like salmon eggs or worms or something like that, they were catching too many of those small fish, so we told the Indians, "We'd like to see a regulation which would prohibit the angler from using bait, and he could only use artificial lures. And then we'd like to see a size limit of seventeen inches put on, which would get the fish through that first year's onslaught of anglers after they were planted,

and give them the chance to get some real size on them." And the Indians went along with this.

Seney: How long would it take the average six-inch reared trout to get up to seventeen inches? One year?

Trelease: Well, the first year that we planted them, they wouldn't make it. The second year they *could* make it. But some of them would reach the seventeen-inch size limit. So then we went to a nineteen-inch size limit, and made it so that the angler couldn't keep a fish under nineteen inches. And that seemed to be working. Then the fish started coming in on their third summer out in the lake, they'd pass the nineteen-inch size limit, and then they'd be caught the following fall as twenty-, twenty-five-inch fish—be real nice fish. And the Indians went along with us on that. Then later after we relinquished our part in the fishery of the lake, the Fish and Wildlife Service then started coming in pretty strong.

Seney: You turned it over to them, did you?

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Takes Over Recovery Program

Bureau of Reclamation History Program

- Trelease: The Fish and Wildlife Service had more funds at their disposal than we did. And they built hatcheries to supply fish to the lake. We kind of got into a conflict with them, and finally our State Fish and Game Department just pulled out it, said, "You take it." And we got out of it totally. We hated to do it because we felt we had a legitimate place in the program out there because we had started it and developed and restored the fishery.
- Seney: What year was it that you got out and turned it over to them?
- Trelease: I'd say it was in the 70s. I'd have to go back through my records to find that out. Anyway, we pulled out of the management of the lake entirely. It was after the fisheries project was started at the lake and the new dam was built at Marble Bluff, and the fish facility was put in. We had helped develop all the plans for that, and worked with the Bureau of Reclamation, even went back to Denver, Colorado. They had a model which they had built there where they could put flows of water through there that would be equivalent to so much flow [in the river]. Then they got sand and gravel from the

Pyramid Lake area and took it back there to see how much velocity it would take before erosion would become a problem down there. We even worked with them and went back there on that. So we felt we had a legitimate place in the management, but the Fish and Wildlife Service didn't exactly feel that way, nor did the Indians. The Indians felt that they could get more out of the Fish and Wildlife Service because they had more funds to work with [than we did]. So we got out of it. And the Fish and Wildlife Service then took over the management.

Well, one of the first things they did is start changing regulations. And from what I've heard since, the fishing had gone downhill. It wasn't maintained at the level that we had it. One of the things they did was to take off the nineteen-inch size limit. Just too many fish that second year were being taken under the seventeen [inch size limit].

Seney: So the catch of big fish began to decline.

Trelease: Yeah. So the fishing began to show signs of it. We had men out there working during the fishing season [when we were involved in the management]. A fellow by the name

of Kay Johnson worked with us, and he did an excellent job of getting creel census data. He and Warren Toby would work out there in all kinds of weather, getting creel census data which showed us what was happening, you know.

Seney: "Creel census data," meaning?

Trelease: Well, you stop the anglers after they've finished coming off the lake, you find out how many fish they caught, you measure each fish that they caught and get the weight of it, and [check to see] if there's any tagged fish—that's with metal tags or other types of tags, ~~you get that off of the fish~~ [that were placed on the fish prior to planting them]. If they had any clipped fins, you'd get that off the lake. And you'd find out how long the angler fished to catch the fish that he had. You get the number of anglers as they come off. You get a wealth of information that gave you the opportunity to evaluate your tagging programs and your fin-clipping operations and your planting operations. We were tagging and marking fish at different sizes.

So that's what we were doing, and

that was helping us to evaluate [the fishery]. And we had the good cooperation of the Indians at that time, and everybody seemed to be pleased. But when we got the third party in, the Fish and Wildlife Service—and I'm not saying this to be nasty about it but it's what actually happened. I can even document these things. I've got files of data here that show these things I've been talking about.

Seney: You mean when they began to attempt to take things over.

Trelease: Yeah.

Seney: Again, you think the motive was here on the Indians' part simply that this was a little richer source of funds (Trelease: Yeah.) than you guys were.

Trelease: They still were very friendly to us as individuals, but they could see that we didn't have the funds to work with that the federal government had, and the federal government, the people that worked for them, it's like a triangle of women and men—they don't always see eye-to-eye. So we'd get into conflicts, and as we got into those conflicts we could see that we were at

a disadvantage because we didn't have that kind of money. So we just figured the best way to do is to get out of it and let the federal government handle it, and kind of ride herd on them and see that they did the same kind of a job that we did. That's what we tried to do. But there had to be somebody kind of spearheading the thing out of our department, and after I retired, we kind of lost that desire to do that, because I had been working on that lake for so long, it just was part of me almost.

Seney: It meant something to you personally, did it not?

Trelease: Yeah. And we had some good men that took over our department, but they had a lot of other irons in the fire around the state that were putting more pressure on them and more interesting to *them* than Pyramid Lake was, because by that time we were out of the Pyramid Lake situation and the federal government was handling it. So they had the attitude, "Well, let the federal government continue," and they'd work on some of their programs that *they* thought were more important. So that's kind of the way it went.

Seney: Let me just go back to ask you one more question. You said when you started out with putting the cutthroat in, you put the fry and the fingerlings and the reared fish in, and you could clip the fins on the reared fish, so you could tell if you were getting reared fish. How did that work out? Did the fry and fingerlings survive, or did they . . .

Reintroducing Cutthroat Trout into Pyramid Lake

Trelease: We don't really know.

Seney: To the extent you got them back out, were they mostly clipped fins?

Trelease: Well, we got a lot of clipped fins and we got a lot of unclipped fish, and that's why we thought maybe some of these, particularly fingerling—we didn't have much confidence in the real small ones, but we thought that the unclipped fingerling that we were putting in were coming into the picture. And another thing that gave us a little support on that is we had planted some Kokanee salmon into the lake, and they were *only* planted as fingerling, and we got some of those back. But they never seemed to do well, they never put the growth on that we hoped they would, and so we just quit fooling with them and

they gradually faded out of the picture.

Seney: And you stuck with the cutthroat?

Trelease: We stuck with the rainbow *and* the cutthroat, but we tried to get more emphasis on the cutthroat. But in the early stage of working with cutthroat there wasn't a lot known about them, and some of our personnel were the ones that developed most of the information on the rearing of cutthroat. And as time went on and they became more successful at rearing them, we put more and more in, up to the capability of our facilities. And that's why when the federal government came in they put in a hatchery over on the Carson River by Minden that would provide more cutthroat trout, and put in the facility at the mouth of the Truckee River for taking eggs from the Pyramid Lake Trout that were successful, you know, with the thought that those eggs and young would be more successful because they survived *in* Pyramid Lake, and it was kind of a natural selection thing. Now we agree with that wholeheartedly.

END SIDE 1, TAPE 2. SEPTEMBER 12, 1994.

BEGIN SIDE 2, TAPE 2. SEPTEMBER 12, 1994.

- Seney: The [original] cutthroat trout [population] died out in Pyramid Lake and that the ones that replaced them came from Independence Lake, is that right?
- Trelease: No, it's not right, it wasn't Independence. We used to take eggs in cooperation with California at Heenan Lake. There's two versions I've heard on how the fish got into Heenan Lake, which is in California, south of Minden and Gardnerville. One is that they were cutthroat trout that came up out of Walker Lake, [into the part of the Walker that lies in California] and the other one that they were planted in there from Blue Lake, and I don't know where Blue Lake is in California.
- Seney: It's along Highway 89, back off Highway 89.
- Trelease: Is that in that same area?
- Seney: In the same area, yes. A little bit further over towards—do you know where Red Lakes is?
- Trelease: I've heard of it.
- Seney: It's off Highway 89, back in that area, so it's a distance.

Trelease: Well is it part of the Walker River drainage?
Is it in that?

Seney: You know, it may be, as a matter of fact.

Trelease: Well, in either case, they could possibly be
the Walker River strain of cutthroat trout.

Seney: But that would be different than the Pyramid
Lake strain.

Trelease: That would have been a different strain. But
because of that, we had contacted California
and asked them if we could take eggs at
Heenan Lake, and they graciously gave us
the authority to do that. (aside about tape)
And as time went on, they kept letting us
take eggs every year there. Well, we'd take
the eggs there and take them into the Verdi
Hatchery, hatch them out, and then rear
them up to fingerling stage or even up to
reared fish stage for planting throughout the
state, and into Pyramid Lake.

Then we started taking fingerling and
hauling them up to Catnip Reservoir up in
northern Washoe County, and it was either
northern Washoe or northern Humboldt
County. And we'd take eggs from there,

after we developed runs there, and bring them down to the hatchery as well, as well as from Heenan Lake. And then we started taking eggs in Summit Lake, which were endemic to *that* lake, and doing the same thing, taking eggs there and hauling them down to Verdi and hatching them out, and then planting those out as reared fish into Pyramid. And then finally we planted some of the cutthroat into Marlette Lake which is high above Lake Tahoe [in Nevada], and we developed a population of them up there. We took eggs up there and used them for the same purpose. So we were getting eggs from all these different sources, and we'd fin clip them differently to see which ones seemed to be the most successful.

Seney: Was there a difference between them?

Trelease: We would get better returns on some than on others. And that's about the time I began to get out of the picture.

Seney: Does this turn them into a kind of a hybrid.

Trelease: They weren't hybrids, they were pure strains of each one.

Seney: I'm thinking about when they spawn. Will

the male of one of the other strains fertilize the eggs?

Trelease: No, because we would only take marked males. And we'd take like marked females and fertilize them and then rear [the young and plant them] them. We tried to keep them separate all the way through [the process].

Seney: You need a fish hatchery down at Pyramid Lake, and there is one there now, because the fish don't get out, right? You've got to artificially inseminate them, so to speak.

Trelease: Yeah, unless they can successfully spawn in the Lower Truckee River below Derby Dam. And I think that there's some effort being made to see what they will do in that section of the river. But while I was with them, why, we hadn't reached that stage. We were still stocking various strains into the lake, and checking to see how they would do. Well then when the Fish and Wildlife Service came into the picture, they used the fish from the hatchery over by Minden to do most of their rearing, and then they'd stock them into the lake. And then they built a hatchery on the reservation down by

Numana Dam, and they would use that for rearing. I've never even been in that hatchery, so I don't know just what they're doing there.

Seney: Well, one of the people I'll be talking to is the man who runs that facility, so I'll at least be able to ask him.

Trelease: Yeah, he'll be able to tell you how they're using it

Seney: Right. Did you do much down at the Stillwater Wildlife Area too?

Stillwater Wildlife Area

Trelease: I was in charge of the fisheries program at Stillwater, but it was primarily bass and catfish, bluegill.

Seney: During the time that you would have been in charge of that, toward the end of that period just before you were retiring, was the wildlife area shrinking, the marsh shrinking because of less spillage from T-C-I-D?

Trelease: Yes, partially that, and partially because of the drought. We had some dry years then, too, before I retired. The marsh got very

low.

Seney: What were you doing down in the marsh?
Can you tell me a little bit about the marsh
project?

Trelease: Mostly I was just working with the man that
we had assigned to that area. His name was
Bob Sumner. I was working with him and
we were principally trying to maintain the
bass population, which was the important
fishery there, and also catfish. That was a
pretty important fishery, and there were
some bluegill in there, but it was mostly
large-mouth black bass.

Seney: Is there anything that you want to tell me
that I haven't asked you about Pyramid Lake
that you think is important for us to know?
And the role of the Newlands Project, and
the Bureau, and all of these things?

Trelease: Well, after I retired, I was asked to be a
consultant for the state. But I told them
before I ever went to work with them that
my primary interest was Pyramid Lake, and
I'd help them to try and get all the water they
could, if it didn't interfere with restoring the
fishery of the lake. And I did try that, and I

tried to help the people that I worked with—that is, the attorneys and give them as accurate of information as I could, and I did that. And not always was [the information I gave them] in their favor, but they appreciated it.

Seney: What exactly were you working on that kind of put you on the other side of the question?

Trelease: Well, I tried to emphasize the lower flows that would sustain both the *cui-ui* and the cutthroat, rather than going for higher flows, I would try and focus-in on the lower flows that would still be successful in getting the fishery protected. And that's what my focus was. And I worked with the attorneys and the engineers in that same regard.

Seney: Let me ask you after all this experience with Pyramid Lake, going back well more than fifty years in your experience with the Game and Fish Department, to kind of give me your thoughts about the Newlands Project and about the Bureau's activities; if you think the Newlands Project should have been built in the first place; if you think maybe it should be phased-out and the water *should* be used for other things. What conclusions have you come to?

Effects of the Newlands Project

Trelease: Well, the conclusion that I've come to is that if the federal government had properly recognized the interest of the Indians and their commitment to the Indians, because they set that reservation aside, because of its fishery. Well, instead of taking the fish away from the water, they took the water away from the fish. I think that was a mistake. I think if they'd have recognized the Indians' interests there, and *included* them in with all the other interests, and then taken the water source and divided it up on a fair basis, then everybody would have gotten consideration. Maybe none of them would have gotten all they wanted, but they would have gotten their fair consideration, that everybody would have been treated properly. And if they had done that, maybe we wouldn't have the developments in agriculture that we've got today, we probably wouldn't have the developments in the size of Reno and Sparks that we've got today. Pyramid Lake might have had a little more and better fishery for the tribe, and we probably wouldn't have all the conflicts we've got today. That's my feeling on it.

- Seney: Okay, is there anything else you want to add, because I've asked you pretty much all the questions that I wanted to ask you about the fishery program on Pyramid Lake. I know there are probably many things I *haven't* asked.
- Trelease: Yeah, there's probably things I haven't told you, too.
- Seney: There probably are, yeah.
- Trelease: But it's because of an oversight. And then, you know, I'm not as young as I used to be, and my memory isn't as good as it used to be. I might have gotten a few dates that weren't quite accurate.
- Seney: That's alright, we're not interested in dates so much. We can double-check the dates. What we're more interested in is your direct experiences with the lake. Your descriptions of the trout runs in the early days are very valuable and very interesting as part of the record. Those are probably not written down any other place, and that's the kind of thing that we're interested in. Are there any other kinds of those sort of observations or recollections that you might want to include that maybe you haven't because I haven't

asked the right question?

Trelease: No, it isn't because you haven't asked the right questions—your questions have been fine—but there are some of the wishes that I would like to have seen. I wish that the Fish and Wildlife Service and the Department of Fish and Game and the Indians could have continued working closely together as a team. I think more progress would have been made on the fishery, and I think that a lot of hard feelings could have been avoided. But that's all water under the bridge now, and it is too late, so there's no point in going back and looking at that. The only thing we can do, or *should* do is see what we've got today and go forward on it.

Seney: Well, on behalf of the Bureau of Reclamation, I really appreciate your giving us your time and insights. It will be very useful.

Trelease: Glad to do it.

Seney: Thanks, again.

END SIDE 2, TAPE 2. SEPTEMBER 12, 1994.
END OF INTERVIEW.